

## [Many of the settlers of Colrain]

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TOPIC Study of Folklore in Berkshire Colrain

Many of the settlers of Colrain have come from Vermont or thru the state to stop in this hilly town. The land is little different than in many parts of Vermont and is nearer waterpower and transportation is easier to find from this section. Hence many of the oldest families of this town were originally from Vermont. In fact the first families in this very old town were Scotch-Irish people from Londonderry, New Hampshire and those persons who wanted to leave Vermont and come with the New Hampshire group. [? ?]

George Day is a descendant of one of these old Scotch-Irish families who does the line no great credit. His claim to fame seems to lie in his questionable shrewdness and the humor which he inspired in the persons with whom he came in contact. Not everyone who knew him that he was funny, especially those whom his "business" dealings touched. But he is a character.

Luther Day, George's grandfather, was a marvelous old Scotchman. He was, as folks describe him - a thoroughbred Scotchman. With all the canniness and business sense given his race and with a generation or more of New England born stamina behind him, old Luther built and planned his sheep farm. He chose his farm land with more foresight than interested neighbors knew and had his line - the strain of the Scotch Days continued foremost in the descendants Colrain might have been the scene of enormous sheep farms instead of having small scattered flocks of sheep to different farmers. Sheep raising might have been one of the major industries instead of poultry, fruit farming and cattle raising

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2 as it is now. Luther was as honest as the day is long. Business deals were matters where this was tested for he also knew how to drive a bargain. He never allowed anyone to get the better of him and refused to have business with anyone whom he found trying to drive too sharp a bargain where dishonesty entered. In turn he always dealt fairly with his associates altho he wasn't known as the easiest man in town to persuade. Once Luther's mind was made up, no strategy, such as working on his kindness would make the matter different for him. He made his mind up quickly and prided himself on sticking to his decisions and he had little respect for anyone who could be talked out of their way of thinking even if Luther did the persuading himself. They were weak according to his standard.

The fertile hills of the Berkshires in this region gave Luther Day ample pasturage for his sheep and even tho the New England snow storms were no less severe in the area Mr. Day had chosen for his farm he had chosen it for its advantages - and wisely too. Sheltering hills practically surrounded his group of buildings and yet he had planned for the necessity of sun. When snow came, it seemed only to further protect his farm and keep the interiors of his barns warmer. When warm weather came he had green grass and select pastures for his animals sooner than many other farmers. He built his place slowly but steadily and continued to be one of the finest business men of the section. Luther was a fine member of a large family. He had six 3 brothers who grew to manhood and two sisters who lived to be old enough to marry. Luther himself married a French woman and had only three children who lived. They were two sons and a daughter. None of these were as fine as Luther but they did inherit some exceptional qualities. John Day, one of the sons, made a name for himself by becoming the greatest bear hunter in Vermont. Instead of learning carpentering or sheep raising from his father he preferred to be a prime hunter.

The wilds of Colrain furnished small game for ambitious hunters but there were no dense woods or unfrequented places in the town limits where bears might flourish. Vermont has continued to have large tracts of land where these large animals might be found and so it was to this infrequented place that John Day went to pursue his desires. To

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John, the bear seemed to require the most attention. It was perhaps the most damaging animal to farmers and bearskins were once quite valuable as rugs and coats in these sections. Moreover altho the animal might appear to be clumsy in some manners they were far too dexterous for an unseasoned hunter when cornered or protecting young cubs. They were clever and ferocious and large enough to provide a combination of values to the hunter. John Day caring little for education and farming, began his career as a bear hunter early in life. He devoted himself solely to the work - he didn't call it sport and indeed "it wasn't always at the rate that he killed off the animals. In one season John killed forty-two bears! (The number has 4 been variously reported by local enthusiasts and loyal friends but several reliable sources agree that forty-two is nearest the correct story) Higher honors have been sought by men but few attain as complete acclaim as John Day received. He was justifiably proud and in a state where enthusiasm and pride in a leader or champion runs high he was the greatest in his line.

What of the Day farm? Old Luther worked hard on it and his two other sons helped him until they married and left. John worked on the farm reluctantly and he had no interest in it except in "keeping the bears away from the sheep." Old Luther lived to be a very old man. He was over eighty-five years old which is however, not as old as many of these "old timers lived to be". Perhaps Luther's death was hastened by his disappointment in his son and because he had to work so very hard in his last days to keep his farm running. He was satisfied with John's record in Vermont but he had hoped one of his sons would love the farm and go on with it. This disappointment was perhaps the greatest blow of his life. When John inherited the place he had to settle down more than he had ever done but as his interest was not centered on the farm so the farm did not flourish. John did enough work to make a living for his family on the farm but he made no improvements and indeed he let what buildings and equipment there was on the place get into a bad state. John had seventeen children but only two girls, and a boy named George lived. Each generation seemed to decrease in the number of children who lived to grow up as well as sterling qualities. John had married an English 5 woman who altho she wanted

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the work done on the farm was no inspiration to him nor did she have the ability to insist on John's attendance to the farm duties. The daughter of this family left the old farm when she married but her brother stayed on the land. One might now begin to hope that the promising old place would be brought back to productivity and repair. This was not to be however because George has proved to be the least of the Day line. The "talents" he possessed, somehow became diverted into queer channels and the old farm was neglected so that it fast became a ruin. Today all of the smaller buildings have disappeared and farmhouse and barns are almost black with neglect. The winds and rain and snow year by year have caused considerable damage so that now the place is not fit for habitation. A distant relative of the Days expressed some disgust that the farm was allowed to go to rack and ruin. Said he, "If old "grandpa" Day can bee his old sheep farm now he must be in a regular swivet. He thot a mighty lot of that place. It's a dam shame."

The last of the Day line is George Day. He is now an old man over ninety years old altho he may have died recently. The relatives have never been too interested in poor old George and knew less about him than the neighbors, perhaps because his relatives didn't like to acknowledge that they were people of his. George returned to the "scene of his crime" to live several years ago. This is another town high in the Berkshires and called North Adams. It was here that he carried on some of his business when he was young and where he remained until the scandal in which he involved himself was over. (or until he thot it was over)

When George was very young school was not as compulsory as it now 6 is. He was sent to school of course. His mother saw to that but she couldn't watch him all day and more often than not her son was far from the location of the school. He wouldn't learn and no one made much attempt to teach him anything. Consequently about the only things that George knew was how to talk and figure some. His speech was a combination of baby talk and "back woods" talk, and peculiarly George's. When one considers that some of his expressions were old Yankee idioms and then that he gave them a definite twist of his own, it is easy to understand why people have remembered so many incidents in George's

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life. His speech is practically a dialect. A nephew of his was riding on the wagon with him one day and when they got home the young fellow had a new joke to tell everyone about George. He said when they got finished in town with the business they had to do and started for home George suddenly remembered he hadn't bought a newspaper. Well the boy knew George couldn't read a word but he thot perhaps he was buying it for someone else so he didn't ask his uncle what he wanted the paper for. On the way back they were quiet as susal. The nephew couldn't think of any subject that he and his uncle could discuss at any length so they rode without talking. Suddenly, as if he had just remembered it, George unsettled himself and squirmed around on the seat of the wagon and finally produced the paper he had purchased in the town. Very carefully and with extravagant care he folded it until he had it the desired size to holdwell and proceeded to become very intent on it. His nephew smiled to himself at the importance George was assuming as if serious matters were to be found on the 7 pages he was scanning. The boy knew his uncle couldn't read a word so he thot he have a little fun with him. "Well," he said, "What's all the news today, Uncle George?" George shook his head slowly as if he were agreeing with some statement made therein, smacked his lips and then spit a large mouthful of tobacco juice indifferently over the side of the wagon and with a shrug said "Aw's on'y 'ittle bit a sewin' circle goin' on - just sewin' circle." The boy thot perhaps he might have understood a word or two in the item so he glanced over his uncle's shoulder and there he was holding the newspaper very confidently-up-side-down! George continued to read as they rode along and his nephew continued to want to laugh but he didn't want to hurt his uncle's feelings nor did he quite dare to give vent to all the laughter he felt because his relative was a big, powerful man and when he felt there was a special grievance against him he could exhibit a violent temper.